2: Jochelson E-5 (1884-1902) 1933 Yakut

(*Coregonus leucichtys, C. Omul, C. Muksun, C. clupoides*), the chief catch of the natives on the shores of Okhotsk and Bering seas consists of salmon of the genus *Oncorhynchus;* the dog salmon (*O. lagocephalus* or *O. keta*), the humpback salmon (*O. proteus* or *O. horbusha*), the red salmon (*O. lycaodon* or *O. niarka*), the chawicha (*Salmo orientalis*), and some others. With the migrating fish coming from the Arctic Ocean belong also the starlet (*Acipenser ruthenus*) and the sturgeon (*Acipenser sturio*). 136

Many coregonidae and other species of fish live continuously in the Arctic rivers and in the numerous tundra lakes.

Population of the Polar Region

The population to the north of the Verkhoyansk Ridge is very small. This region has only 0.01 man to a quadratic mile, or 1 man to 100 square miles. Settlements are confined to the river valleys and the shores of large lakes abounding in fish. The tundra dweller of Siberia seldom settles on the seacoast or on the adjacent islands, as do the American Eskimo. Since off shore the sea is quite shallow the hunting of sea mammals has not been developed; for instance, the ocean between the mouth of the Kolyma River and the Sviatoi Nos to the west is only seven meters deep at a distance of ten or twenty miles from shore. West of the Chukchee are no sea-going peoples and no skin boats. Late in the fall, when snowstorms begin to rage on the tundra, the nomadic natives wander southward to the protection of the forests. 161 ● 634 131 [361]

The Chukchee and Yukaghir are regarded as indigenous tribes of the region. The Tungus were forced to the Arctic region when the Yakut, migrating from the south, occupied Yakut Province. In their turn, the Yakut crossed the Verkhoyansk Ridge when the Russian conquerors invaded the Lena country and were followed to the Arctic region by Russians who settled at the mouths of the rivers. The climate is unfit for agriculture, but the Yakut introduced horned cattle and horses. Cattle-breeding, however, also encounters many obstacles: the grasses are of poor quality, the haying and fishing seasons coincide, and for nine months of the year the soil is covered with a deep layer of snow. In spite of the abundance of fish, famines are frequent, owing to lack of cooperation, methods of conservation, and foresight. The basic economic foundation of Arctic Siberia is the domesticated reindeer. The Yakut, as well as all the other tribes of the region, both aboriginal and immigrant, are endeavoring to acquire the reindeer, an important factor in their welfare. [221] [511]

2· Jochelson E-5 (1884-1902) 1933 Yakut

161
634
131

The Olekminsk District. The Olekminsk District in the south of Yakutsk Province is considerably smaller than others of the province as a part of it was annexed to the Vitimsk District of Irkutsk Province, when the gold mining region of Vitim was developed. At present it is confined to the valley of the Olekma River and to a small area to the north of the Lena River. The district town of Olekminsk is situated on the east bank of the Lena River not far from the mouth of its tributary, the Olekma River. Olekminsk District is a mountainous region and the Yakut population of about 10,000 is mainly concentrated in the Lena Valley, while on the tributaries of the Lena and in the mountains the nomadic Tungus predominate. The Yakut form one administrative unit, the Olekminsk *Ulus*, which is divided into six *naslegs* and forty-four clans. The largest *nasleg* is the Second Meitsky which includes fourteen clans.

The Viliuisk District. Viliuisk District lies beyond the principal lines of communication. It has no high mountain ridges like those bordering the Yakutsk District and is covered with dense forests called *taiga*. As has been previously stated, the northern part of the former Viliuisk District, which included the west bank of the lower course of the Lena, a region rich in fish, furs, and mammoth tusks, was recently detached from it to form a new district, named Bulun, after a Yakut fishing and trading post on the lower course of the Lena. At present the new Bulun District comprises a vast territory between the seventieth degree of north latitude and the Polar Sea and the Indighirka and Khatanga rivers. The Khatanga River is the boundary line between the Province of Yakutsk and Yeniseisk. As formerly constituted, Viliuisk consisted of four administrative divisions called *ulus* (Suntar, Markha, Upper-Viliuisk, and Middle Viliuisk *uluses*). The Suntar *Ulus* was divided into fourteen *naslegs* comprising seventy-five clans; the Markhinsk *ulus* had sixteen *naslegs* comprising eighty-six clans; the Upper Viliuisk *ulus* had twelve *naslegs* and forty-two clans; the Middle Viliuisk *ulus* had fourteen *naslegs* with forty-one clans. The population of about 67,000 is divided into 244 clans.

The Yakutsk District. The former Yakutsk District is now divided into two districts: Yakutsk and Aldan. The latter occupies the valley of the Aldan River, an eastern tributary of the Lena, and its tributaries. We will review the district in accordance with its former boundaries. Second in size after the Verkhoyansk District, Yakutsk District assumes first place in density of population. The table land between the Lena River and its tributary, the Aldan, is most heavily populated. Yakutsk

2: Jochelson E-5 (1884-1902) 1933 Yakut

District is divided into eight *uluses:* 1, the East Khangalas *ulus* has twelve *naslegs*, including fifty-two clans, numbering about 14,500 people; 2, the West Khangalas *ulus* has nineteen *naslegs* which include sixty-seven clans with a population of about 22,000; 3, the Namsky *ulus* has seventeen *naslegs* and eighty-seven clans with a population of 17,550; 4, the Meghinsky *ulus* has sixteen *naslegs*, sixty-eight clans, and a population of 20,036; 5, the Borogon *ulus* has thirteen *naslegs*, forty-five clans, and a population of about 9,700; 6, The Bayagantai *ulus* has nine *naslegs*, 143 clans, and a population of 9,292; 7, the Baturus *ulus* has thirty-one *naslegs*, 107 clans, and 30,335 people; 8, the Dupsun *ulus* has eight *naslegs*, twenty-seven clans, and 7,706 people. The total number of clans in the Yakutsk District is 596 with a population of 131,088 (64,818 men, 66,270 women) showing a surplus of 1,452 women over men, or 0.55 per cent.

In 1927 the Academy of Sciences of Leningrad published, under the editorship of Professor Paul Wittenburg a volume under the title of "*Iakoutie,*" meaning the Yakut country. The volume contains 746 pages and includes twenty maps and tables, 78 drawings, nineteen photographs of the country investigated, and sixteen papers by specialists on the history, geo-morphology, geology, soil, fossils, vegetation, fur-hunting, fishing, agriculture, forestry, roads, and other items. In the present publication the writer has utilized the data thus presented.

Climate

The fundamental factors which determine the climate of a country are: its latitude, the relation between land and sea, elevation above sea level and topography, and its situation with reference to adjoining areas of high or low pressure. A glance at a map may give a general idea of the first three factors. We will survey, in detail, the last factor, upon which the other climatic elements depend to a large degree.

Throughout the year, in Yakutsk and Verkhoyansk, we observed only moderate winds or absolute calm. During all seasons, absolute calm is more frequent in the evenings and rare during the day. In Yakutsk May and in Verkhoyansk June is the windiest month. North of Verkhoyansk the velocity of the wind increases with the decrease in altitude. Between Yakutsk and Verkhoyansk the velocity of the wind is eight meters a second and between Verkhoyansk and the Polar Sea ten meters a second.

The following table shows the velocity of wind in Yakutsk at different altitudes:—

6: Sauer--112-113 G-5 (1785-94) 1802 Yakut-1-2
116, 161, 178, 651, 177, 65 Russia
636.65

"Their number is computed at Yakutsk to be 50,000 males; but I am inclined to think that they are not so numerous; and my reasons are these: They say themselves, that in 1780 they were more numerous than they are now, much better circumstanced, and in an increasing state. At that time they had only one Commander and his Assistant. (1)

1. I am here induced to remark, that before the Empress Catherine II established governments and courts of justice throughput the empire (1782), all these distant towns and districts were governed by a voyavod and his secretary, and Cossacs were sent among the tributary tribes to enforce the imperial mandates. On the establishment of the government, every town had its mayor and different courts of justice allowed; so that there now exist many towns in these remote parts, where the inhabitants consist of government people only.

Upon the Socha chiefs bringing their annual tribute, they always observed the custom of shewing their particular attachment, by making these gentlemen a [113] trifling present of furs, horses, and cattle, and supplying their table with flesh, fish, milk, and butter, and also with wild fowl. Considering their immense possessions, and the cheapness of all the articles, these presents were never felt as of any consequence by the

individuals who made them. At present, however, their stock is considerably diminished, not amounting to one tenth part of what it was. Instead of having only the voyavod and his secretary to deal with, they now know not how many commanders they have to pay their respects to. A commandant, a captain of the district, a director of economy, judges of the different courts of justice, with their secretaries and dependants, and other officers, are occasional travellers among them; beside which, they complain of numberless exactions according to the arbitrary will of their superiors, only authorised by their own presumption.

These circumstances undoubtedly discourage the activity of the Yakut, who no longer endeavors to procure wealth, because it is the likeliest means of making him the object of persecution. Thus property, tranquillity, and population decrease. The princes or chiefs dwelling near towns acquire their luxuries, and oppress their dependant tribes to procure wine and brandy in addition to their koumis: this was never known among them till the year 1785. I will farther add, that in 1784 the district of Gigansk produced 4834 tributary natives; but in 1789 their number amounted only to 1938. Mr. Bonnar, the captain of the district of Zashiversk, told me, that the tributary nations in his circle amounted to only half the number that they were five years ago and that these were very poor indeed."

6: Sauer--113-114 G-5 (1785-94) 1802 Yakut
116, 161, 464, 591

"To my certain knowledge, upwards of 1500 Yakuti are hired as labourers by the inhabitants of the town of Yakutsk; their wives dwell with the tribes, and do not see their husbands for years. However, I have some other [114] reasons, which will be mentioned hereafter, to account for the decrease in the population of this nation."

6: Sauer--136 G-5 (1785-94) 1802 Yakut
116, 101, 161, 651

"To give my readers an idea of the population of these northern parts of Siberia, I here note the inhabitants from the latitude of 64 to the extremity of the north coast, and from the river Kovima, westward to the Anabara.

The district of Zashiversk comprehends the rivers Kovima, Alafey, Indigerka, and Yana, and those that flow into them; the tributary nations are,

Yakuti	- -	2810
Lamut and Tungoose	-	742
Yukagiri	- -	322
Tshuvantsi and Chatinsy	-	37
Tribute received 1788 amounts to rubles 4560 for		3911 males.

The circuit is about 6000 versts in circumference. The district of Gigansk, a town north of Yakutsk on the Lena, contains one church, two government houses, seven private ones, and 15 huts. It has a mayor (Gorodnitshik) and his chancery, a court of the district (Zemikoi Sud), and a magistracy, although the merchants are mere trading pedlars, and only two, I think, in number. Its circuit also is about 6000 versts from the Yana to the Anabara, which divides the governments of Tobolsk and Irkutsk. The tributary nations are,

Yakuti	- -	1449
Tungoose	- -	489
		1938

Tribute received in 1788--56 sables, 262 foxes, and rubles 1169 in money."

7: Shklovsky -- 249-250 T-3 (1891-92) 1916 Yakut
116, 161

"The Yakuts and Bouriats are the only Siberian [250] natives who are not dying out, but, on the contrary, are rapidly increasing in number."

9: Stadling--56 E-3 (1898) 1901 Yakut
116, 161

"The Buriats and the Yakuts are the only natives in Siberia who do not show any signs of dying out, but on the contrary are increasing."

2 Stadling--88[2] E-3 (1898) 1901 Yakut

116, 161

"The entire population of Yakutskamounted in Janurary 1897, according to offical reports, to277, 855, of whom 6 per cent were Russians, the remainder belonging to different native races. Of these natives no less than 93 per cent, or 244, 183, are Yakuts; 10, 269 are Ttunguses, and the rest belong to various smaller tribes, such as the Dolgans, Lamuts, Yukagris, etc."

11: Lansdell--299-300 M-3 (1879) 1882 Yakut
116, 101, 144, 161, 174

"Strahlenberg divides them into 10 tribes, and Syboreen's Almanack for 1876 gives their number at 210,000. They belong to the great Turk family, and hence their Siberian locality is remarkable, because the Turks [300] have ever been the people to displace others, whereas the Yakutes have been themselves displaced, and driven into this inhospitable climate, it is supposed, by the stronger Buriats."

24: Wrangell--65 G-3 (1820-23) 1842 Yakut
116, 161, 651, 177.65 Russia
636.65

"In the whole Kolyma circle there are now 325 Russian peasants, citizens, and Cossacks, 1034 Jakuti, and 1139 Jukahiri and other races; in all, 2498 males, of whom 2173 pay jassak or tribute.

This jassak consists of 803 foxes and 28 sables, which may be estimated 6704 roubles, and 10, 847 roubles in money, making an average of about eight roubles to be paid by every male of the Jakuti and other tribes."

24: Wrangell--166-167 G-3 (1820-23) 1842 Yakut -1-2
116, 161, 177, 233, 756, 847

"The Jakuti who live on the banks of the Kolyma are not the original inhabitants of the country; their predecessors were the Omoki, the Schelagi, the Tungusi, and the Jukahiri. The Omoki, who were settled fishermen, and the Schelagi, who were a nomad people having reindeer, have so wholly disappeared, partly from wars with intruders, and partly from devastating sickness, that their names are now scarcely remembered. The Jukahiri, also, who were once a numerous nomade race, have greatly diminished. Most of them, having lost their reindeer by disease, now live poorly as fishermen along the banks of different rivers; while a few, who have preserved their reindeer, have withdrawn with them into the tundras near the sea. The Jakuti alone have not only kept up their numbers, but have advanced very considerably in population, and [167] in the cultivation of the soil. To them belongs the merit of having introduced the rearing of cattle and horses, and other branches of rural industry, into a region where the soil, and still more the climate, appeared to forbid all such attempts, and thus securing not merely a subsistence, but some degree of comfort. They may be said to have rendered these inhospitable steppes accessible to the intrepid descendants of Jermak, who have brought with them Christianity, and rescued an ignorant and superstitious people from the delusions of Schamanism and its barbarous customs. (1)

1. It was a frequent practice to expose new-born female children in baskets, suspended from the branches of trees. Sometimes it

happened that, before the infants perished from cold and hunger, they were found and adopted by strangers; and old women are still to be met with in families of which they became members in this way.

The Jakuti are now all baptized. A priest from Sredne Kolymsk visits these settlements every year. An ecclesiastic named Slezzow, who resided here twenty years ago, manifested great courage and zeal in abolishing Schamanism. Wherever he found any idols or heathen altars, he caused them to be destroyed by fire or thrown into the water, and none such are now to be met with. There are still, however, as I have noticed in a former chapter, schamans, who continue to have a few adherents, and are generally consulted, and even by Russians, in regard to finding a stray beast or discovering stolen property."

44: Gilder -- 175 J-2 (1882) 1883 Yakut
116, 161, 177, 342, 361 Russia
636.36

"Sradnia, or Middle Kolymsk, is a Russian settlement of about 500 inhabitants, including Russians Yakouts, and a few Tchouktchis. The houses are all built of hewn logs, are but one story high, and the windows are glazed with blocks of transparent ice. Some of the houses have windows of glass, but these are always much broken and mended, so that seen from the outside they look like the stained-glass windows of a church. The most conspicuous building there, as in all the little Russian towns, is the church edifice, which is of Oriental architecture, with a dome surmounted by a cross and exceedingly florid in its style of architecture. Adjoining the church, and within the same enclosure, is a small wooden tower surrounded by a block-house, which was built by the first settlers of Sradnia as a means of defence against the savage Yakouts and Tchouktchis. This town is irregularly built and extends over a considerable area of ground, the Government buildings being situated about a mile from the centre. By Government buildings is meant merely the storehouses for grain and bread and for the skins which are received for taxes. These buildings are of logs, with great heavy doors and padlocks about the size of an ordinary valise, while the key is a load of itself."

45: Lesseps--200 T-2 (1788) 1790 Yakut
116, 161, 177, 361 Russia
636.36

"I travelled the whole night, and arrived in the morning at the fort of Taousk, being a distance of forty-two wersts. [RCH: from the village of Armani] This ostrog, where, on conformity to the plan we had laid down, we spent the day, is situated on the river Taon. It contains twenty isbas, [RCH: Russian-type dwellings made of wood] a small church served by the vicar of Okotsk, and a building for the reception of tributes, surrounded by palisades in the form of bastions. Twenty Yakouts, two chiefs, and some other Koriacs, who, attracted by the situation, have settled there, make up the whole of the inhabitants. The garrison consists of fifteen soldiers, commanded by a serjeant named Okhotin, at whose house I took up my abode till the evening.

In the night I passed through the village of Gorbé, peopled by Yakouts, and a small number of Koriacs."

49: Findeisen -- 10 E-1 (no date) 1930 Yakut
116, 105, 161

As to statistics of Yakut population, the last figures known amount to 230,000 individuals. After the Kirghizes (3 million) and the Buryats (300,000), the Yakuts are the third-largest of the Siberian nations, and they are one of the most vital and versatile: cattle and horse breeders, hunters, in part farmers, also reindeer-breeders and, in summertime , fishermen. In former times trade flourished among them in certain regions; but the conditions have changed in this respect.

/197 cont./

632 from the Arctic Ocean, owes its present importance less to the rich
[226] fishing, which could be made useful for the more southerly regions
[439] only by the establishment of a steamship company like the one on the Jenissei /Yenisei/, and more to the trade in arctic foxes and in particular in mammoth tusks, which are collected here from the entire region and then taken to the European market by
[136] way of Jakutsk /Yakutsk/ and Irkutsk. Fossil ivory is found throughout northern Siberia, although the richest sources are supposed to be the New Siberian Islands in the Arctic Ocean, but the trip there across the frozen ocean involves great difficulties and dangers, and we were even told that the government had prohibited trading trips there after a party of ivory-seekers perished on one.

●161 According to the more detailed reports gathered by
131 Czekanowsky on his second stay in Bulún, the population of the entire ulússes consists of 2,293 souls, 770 of whom are counted on the stretches of the Lena lying within the forest region, 30 in the forest region along the Olenék, while about 550 live on the timber line itself between the Lena and Anábara, and /198/ over 900 live on the tundra, and, in particular, on the islands at the
131 mouth of the Lena and the Olenék. These people, consisting of
177 Jakuten /Yakut/, or rather Jakutized Tungus, are cut off on all sides from intercourse with other human beings by broad, barren stretches scarcely traversed by a hunter, certainly to their advantage -- I have spoken above, in the description of our sojourn in Boljkalák, of the inhabitants' purity of morals -- may it be preserved here a very long time and may more active intercourse and the cultural advance connected with it exert only a whole-
426 some influence on these upright primitive people. Up to now --
273 at least so we were assured -- the natives strictly guard against running into debt with the merchants, and liquor, this plague advancing in the train of civilization and so corrupting for all primitive peoples, seems to be relatively not very widespread
273 here. I must mention here that the government does not permit, or at least permits only under great limitations, the sale of spirits to the native tribes of Siberia, as well as to the workers at the gold washings, but, in view of the immense tracts of land to be

53:Tokarev and Gurvich E-4 (no date) 1964
RV2 Yakut RV2

THE YAKUTS

S. A. TOKAREV and I. S. GURVICH

The Yakuts are the basic population of the Yakut ASSR, territorially one of the largest Republics in the Soviet Union. The name of this people was taken by the Russians from the Tungus, who called them Jeko. The Yakuts call themselves Sakha, and in the ancient legends they are known as Urangkhay Sakha.

General Information

By language, the Yakuts belong to the Turkic-speaking group of peoples (the northeastern branch), although the language occupies a somewhat isolated position in this group. In the vocabulary and, to some extent, in the grammar of the Yakut language, there are many Mongol elements as well as others of Tungus and of unknown origin.

The total number of Yakuts according to the 1926 census was 235,926 persons, including 122,245 men and 113,681 women. The urban population was 4936 persons and the rural population 230,990. There were 235,523 persons speaking their own (Yakut) language. Statistics for the same year tell us that the Yakuts made up 82.3% of the total population of the Republic, the remainder being 10.4% Russians, 4% Evenks and Lamuts, 0.5% Chukchi and 0.14% Yukagirs.

The principal territory occupied by the Yakuts is the basin of the Middle Lena with the Lower Aldan and Vilyuy. There are also Yakuts living close to the mouth of the Olekma River along the rivers Yana, Indigirka, Kolyma, Olenek and Anabar. Almost the whole of this region is located in the East Siberian taiga belt, which consists partly of mountains and partly of lowlands (the Vilyuy depression). In the Far North, along the Arctic coast, there stretches a wide belt of forestless tundra, 300 km long. The general landscape is a gentle slope from south to north, intersected in different directions by mountain ranges (Verkhoyansk, Cherskiy and so on). The territory is rich in mineral deposits (coal, iron, diamonds, gold, silver, lead ore, platinum, salt, semiprecious stones and so on), but before the Revolution was hardly touched at all. Apart from an extensive network of rivers, Yakutiya has a large number of small lakes. Many of them have been drying up in recent years. The banks of the lakes and rivers as well as the numerous meadows (alaas'y) within the taiga, constitute the cultural oases. The climate is a dry one, severely continental, with fierce frosts throughout the long winter (the cold pole occurs in the upper reaches of the Indigirka, near the village of Oymyakon) with a brief, though hot summer (except for the Far North and the mountainous regions). The soils are saline and fairly fertile. There is a layer of

53:Tokarev and Gurvich E-4 (no date) 1964
RV2 Yakut RV2

developed class relationships and certain very archaic survivals of ancient times. By the time the Russians arrived in the first half of the 17th century, the Yakuts had divided up into independent tribes. The largest and strongest of these were the Kangalastay and Nama on the left bank of the Lena, and the Megins, Borogons, Betuns and Baturustay between the Lena and the Amga; these very large tribes (to judge by the Russian tribute registers) numbered from 2000 to 5000 persons each. The smaller tribal groupings, some of which were independent and some of which belonged to those mentioned above, were reckoned in dozens. In the Russian sources these tribes are called "volosta," but the Yakut name for them was evidently d'on or aymakh. These tribes often warred with one another, and sometimes banded together temporarily for joint operations. All members of one tribe were considered fellow clansmen, which, among other things, was indicated by the fact that the "volosts" were exogamic groups. In turn, the tribes divided into smaller clan groups. The bond between fellow clansmen showed up in the custom of mutual assistance and vendetta, which, incidentally, was often replaced by blood money.

At this period, however, the clan-tribal structure was already in a state of decomposition. The tribes and clans were headed by the military aristocracy—the toyons. These possessed large herds of cattle and employed the labor of slaves and dependent fellow clansmen on their farms; they were also the military leaders. Heading detachments of armed servants and junior fellow clansmen, the toyons raided each other's territory, and frequently looted the farms of the free members of the community, seizing their cattle and destroying their economic independence. These toyon wars and raids were one of the factors which speeded up the decomposition of the clan commune. The ruined members of the commune were reduced to the status of "balyksyts" (poor people without cattle, or fishermen), or else became the indentured slaves of the toyons. Most of the slaves (kuluts or bokans) originated in this way.

The system of slavery among the Yakuts was fairly peculiar in form, containing certain patriarchal elements. The number of slaves was small; even the richer toyons had no more than 15 or 20, and much more frequently there were one to three slaves for each master. The slave usually had his own family and often lived in a separate yurt. Slavery was hereditary. Some of the slaves—the adult males—were part of the armed band of the toyon. On the other hand, cases were known in which the slaves led a hard life and their masters treated them cruelly, and we also know of the manifestation, although embryonic, of class feeling against exploitation (flight by groups of slaves and so on).

The problem of whether or not there was feudalism among the Yakuts before the Russians arrived still remains unsolved in Soviet historical-ethnographic literature.

Some writers (S. V. Bakhrushin and O. V. Ionova) think that early feudal relations among the Yakuts began to form in the pre-Russian period; they consider the presence of groups of semidependent people "living close to" the toyons, as well as the custom of lending cattle for grazing (the later khahaas), to be signs of this. Tokarev considers that a feudal-type relationship only began to form among the Yakuts after they had been annexed to Russia.

As regards land ownership, the older communal-clan system was still in force just before the Russians arrived. The communal form of land use not only predominated in forest hunting grounds and pastures, but the fisheries and even the meadows were still by and large in common use. Nevertheless, the meadows and fisheries had already been taken over to

55:Popov E-5 (no date) 1964 RV2 Yakut RV2
Dolgan

THE DOLGANS

A. A. POPOV

General Information

The Dolgans comprise the basic population of the Taymyr National Okrug. At the present time the Dolgans speak a particular dialect of the Yakut language. They stem from groups of different origin. The nucleus of the Dolgans was made up of 4 clan groups of Tungusic origin—the Dolgans, Edzhens, Karyntuos and Dongots.

The Dolgans call themselves Dulgaan. This name, which is the name of one of the clan groups, was extended to cover all Dolgans in the 19th century, although, many of them still called themselves until recently by the name of the group to which they belonged. Hence they previously did not have any common name for themselves. In the Noril'sk region some Dolgans called themselves tya kisite (which means "man of the forest" in Yakut) or tege (meaning "tribe" or "people" in Evenk). The Dolgans sometimes used the name Tungus but distinguished themselves from the local Evenks in the Taymyr and the Evenk National Okrugs. They do not consider themselves Yakuts and are ethnologically distinct from the latter.

The number of Dolgans was 1224 in 1897, and 1445 in 1926–27. From the beginning of the 20th century, in addition to the "true" Dolgans, this nationality also included other Yakutized groups (so-called tundra peasants and local Evenks) as well as some of the Yakuts living in the same region. In actual fact the entire indigenous population of the Avamskiy and Khatangskiy Rayons, with the exception of the Nganasans and the Evenks living south of the Kheta River and its sources, and the entire indigenous population of the Noril'sk-Pyasina Rural Soviet of the Dudinskiy Rayon in the Taymyr National Okrug can be considered Dolgans. Small groups of Dolgans also live on the Yenisey in the Dudinskiy and Ust'-Yeniseyskiy Rayons.

Before the Revolution the Dolgans formed the following administrative "clans" headed by clan elders or "princelings:" Dolgan-Yenisey (Dolgan proper), Dolgan-Tungus (Dongot), Zhigan-Tungus (Edzhen) and Boganid-Tungus (Karyntuo). The Yakuts who merged with the Dolgans formed the Lower Tundra "Clan" Administration, and to some extent became part of the Betu (Chordu) and other naslegs.

The Dolgan language is a dialect of Yakut and contains Evenk words. The closeness of the Dolgan dialect to the Yakut language decreases as we move from east to west.

According to Russian sources, in the 17th century the territory settled by the present-day Dolgans was occupied by ancestors of the Nganasans. The above-mentioned groups, which later formed the core of the Dolgan people, lived at that time in regions comparatively far removed from the Taymyr: the Dolgan group occupied regions near the mouth of the Vilyuy